The School Promoters

Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada

Alison Prentice

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The Canadian Social History Series

Social history is about people. This series is concerned with broadening the understanding of Canadian history, widening it from a story of past politics to a portrayal of the context in which Canadians have lived and interreacted with one another.

The series takes the broadest possible view of the subject matter of social history. It is concerned not only to encompass as much of the sweep of Canadian history as possible, but also to exploit the whole range of scholarship in this country. That means that it is interested in the social history of our native peoples, in immigration and acculturation, in the development of social institutions such as the family, classes, and voluntary organizations, in ideas and attitudes in their social context, in the social dimension of occupations and industries, in community formation and urban growth, in social movements such as the temperance crusade, the movement for prison reform, and that for the liberation of women, in sports and leisure activities. Social history is the history of the full range of human life, and this series will attempt to represent that range.

Canadian social history is still in its infancy. In few of the areas mentioned above has scholarship developed to the point at which a monograph covering any one of them for the whole time-span could be written. This series, therefore, proposes to take advantage of the work being done on specialized areas and fairly brief chronological periods. Without being narrow, the volumes will present in-depth studies of major themes, rather than sweeping generalities over the whole of Canadian history. Obviously it is hoped that, eventually, the series will build to a comprehensive social history of Canada; in the meantime, the individual volumes will be exemplary of both the subject matter and the approaches of that social history.

Our aim is a series which will be of use both to general readers and to students of history. All of those interested in the develop-

ment of this country will find excitement in these studies of the major themes of social history. At the same time, these are works of original scholarship, opening up new areas of Canadian history for students and academics. So, the books contain the documentation necessary to guide students to the key sources, but are not so weighed down with scholarly paraphernalia as to lose their clarity and readability. Canadians, whether or not they are scholars, are growing ever more concerned to discover their real history. We hope this series will contribute to that discovery.

S. F. Wise
Michael S. Cross

Acknowledgements

As with all histories, the sources of this book are in part personal. For much of my life I have been a student and for a good part of it I have also been both a parent and a teacher. As a teacher, I was most clearly confronted with the question of class and education by a plain speaking principal, who stated that discipline was no problem in his school because the teachers there made more money than the parents of the pupils. As a parent I have been involved with schools from the outside. Periodic frustration with schools or school systems that seemed insensitive to individual or family concerns taught me much about the potential for conflict in the politics of education. Finally, like all students no doubt from the beginning of time, I have been amazed at the contradictory and perverse things that are occasionally said and done in the name of education. Yet it has to be said that in all three roles – as parent, student and teacher – I have also encountered at various times and in many different places, sympathetic educational environments and great teachers. Among those teachers whose guidance has made an enormous difference to me, I would particularly like to thank Katharine Lamont, Michael Katz and Maurice Careless, whose kindness and interest in my work over the years has been vital to whatever success it has had. To my fellow students and other historians who have encouraged my work, my thanks also, especially to Natalie Davis and Susan Houston, and to Harvey Graff, Ned Hagerman and Keith McLeod, whose good cheer and unflagging enthusiasm for my efforts have helped to kindle my own. In addition, I wish to express my appreciation to Atkinson College, York University for a timely research grant and to colleagues at both York and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education who, in ways too numerous to mention, have encouraged research in the history of education. They have done so in the belief that to understand our educational past is at least to hope to act more intelligently and

humanely in the present, a belief which I share and which was the basic reason for writing this book. Thanks also to Syd Wise, Michael Cross and John Roberts, whose interest in Canadian social history made its publication possible and whose editorial skills contributed in large measure to whatever merit the book may have. Lastly, special thanks to the secretaries, students and colleagues, to the members of my family and friends who have tolerated an absent-minded historian in their midst and, fortunately for me, continue to do so.

Alison Prentice

Note on Sources

The Education Papers, or Record Group 2, of the Ontario Archives were the basic manuscript source for this study. Consisting of the official records of those provincial agencies that were made responsible for schools from the founding of the first Upper Canadian Board of Education in 1824, the papers are a goldmine of information and official opinion on schools, their promoters, teachers and clients in the mid-nineteenth century. One of the most valuable parts of the collection is the correspondence of the provincial Department of Public Instruction. The incoming correspondence, preserved in Series C-6-C and consisting of over three hundred boxes of letters dating from 1841 to 1876, necessarily contains much that is rountine. But it also includes hundreds of fascinating letters of inquiry, complaint or comment on an immense variety of topics related to education, from correspondents in all corners of the province. Copies of outgoing letters up to 1860 and drafts of outgoing correspondence for the period after 1860 are held in Series C 1 and C 2. These contain the Department's answers to questions and complaints, as well as the official letters from Ryerson and his deputies to officers of the government, local officials, newspaper editors and the like, on local and provincial school matters. Series B of the Education Papers, which includes the minutes of the second Board of Education, of the Council of Public Instruction which replaced it in 1850, and a letterbook of related correspondence, is also valuable, chiefly for the light these papers shed on the growth and inner management of the provincial Education Department and Normal School. In addition, the minutes record the school regulations, curricula and textbooks approved or authorized by the central administration. Although each of the other series contain items of interest, they cannot be listed here. For a useful guide, the reader is referred to Roy Reynold's sur-

vey of the incoming departmental correspondence for the year 1865, *Analysis of Record Group 2, Ontario Archives Series C-6-C 1865* (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Department of History and Philosophy, Education Records Series No. 4). The introduction, pp. 1-9, consists of a brief survey of the whole record group.

Of the printed sources available to the student of mid-nineteenth century Ontario education, the best known perhaps is the twenty-eight volume *Documentary History of Education in Upper Canada,* edited by J. George Hodgins. After a long career in the Education Department as Deputy Superintendent, then Deputy Minister, Hodgins took on the job of Department "historiographer" and it was in this capacity that he devoted his remaining years to recording the development of Ontario's educational institutions. The resulting *Documentary History,* which was only the largest of several series published by Hodgins, reproduces all of the major laws affecting schools, colleges and universities in Ontario, as well as a huge selection of relevant petitions, speeches, recorded debates, letters, reports and reminiscences for the period from 1791 to 1876. Because the editor found relatively few documents for the years prior to 1844, the collection focuses almost exclusively on the Ryerson period. It is also, as might be expected, heavily biased in favour of Ryerson and the general course that educational reform took during his superintendency. Criticism and controversy are not altogether excluded, but with the exception of some well documented debates on higher education, the opposition to the Chief Superintendent of Schools and to the political stance and social attitudes that he represented finds little space in Hodgins' work.

Other major sources for the study of mid-nineteenth century educational history are the *Annual Reports of the Chief Superintendent of Schools* (variously titled), the superintendent's special reports, and the *Journal of Education for Upper Canada.* The reports as well as the *Journal* were mid-century innovations and, as government critics loudly complained, both were also major vehicles of Education Department propaganda. The *Annual Reports* consist of an introductory summary of the state of the schools by Ryerson, followed by the statistical tables compiled by the Department and a long appendix containing excerpts from the reports of local school authorities to the Chief Superintendent. Many of the *Annual Reports* also include additional appendices reproducing circulars, school regulations, examinations and other items that the Department wished to publicize. The special reports focus on institutions and ideas that Ryerson

was promoting, like the normal school or special training for the deaf, or on issues like the separate school question. It is true that quite a lot of the material from the annual and special reports found its way into the *Journal of Education* and that, in addition, a great many journal articles were reprinted from American, European or other Canadian sources. Yet important Ryerson speeches and editorials not reproduced elsewhere may also be found in it, as well as original pieces by other British North Americans on education and related subjects. While no material of "a controversial nature" was accepted by the editors (who were Hodgins and Ryerson) many of the social and educational issues of the day are reflected in the pages of the *Journal* in spite of this apparent restriction.

A more revealing vehicle of educational debate in the period, however, was the public letter. The numerous collections of official and unofficial correspondence which were published in pamphlet form, as participants in various public debates sought wider support for their views, are therefore essential sources for mid-nineteenth century educational history. Equally valuable are the numerous pamphlets reproducing speeches, public lectures and sermons on topics related to education and the schools. Finally, there are the textbooks which were published during the period, slim but important documents that sometimes reveal as much about the values and concerns of their authors as about curricula and teaching methods in the schools. It is textbooks such as *The Youth's Guard Against Crime* by Israel Lewis (Kingston, 1844), or pamphlets like Adam Townley's *Seven Letters on the Non-Religious Common School System of Canada and the United States* (Toronto, 1853) or Walter Eales' *Lectures on the Benefits to be Derived from Mechanics' Institutes* (Toronto, 1851) that reveal how far formal education in the mid-nineteenth century continued to extend beyond the immediate orbit of the nascent public school system or of Egerton Ryerson and his deputies in the provincial Department of Public Instruction.

In this vein, it is perhaps not unreasonable to mention here some sources for nineteenth century educational history that were not consulted in depth for this study, but which clearly have much to offer student of the period. These fall into five major categories: diaries and family papers; newspapers; school, academy, college and university records, including attendance registers and trustee board minutes; the records of other educational institutions, such as reformatories and orphanages; and quantitative sources like the manuscript census.* It is through the imaginative use of such local literary and quantitative rec-

ords, in combination with the official and provincial educational literature, that future students will be able to deepen our understanding of the complex changes in child rearing and schooling that took place in the mid-nineteenth century.

* For examples of the use of such sources, consult the works of Ian Davey, Harvey Graff, Susan Houston and Michael Katz, cited in the footnotes. Useful guides to some of the basic literature may be found in the Educational Records Series published by the Department of History and Philosophy of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. This series includes, in addition to the analysis of Record Group 2, C-6-C 1865 cited above, guides to relevant pamphlets, printed government documents and references to education in private papers in the Ontario Archives, as well as to a variety of other local and provincial records of interest to students of educational history.

Abbreviations

Annual Report	*Annual Report of the Normal, Model, Grammar and Common Schools in Upper Canada, by the Chief Superintendent of Schools.* (Titles vary, depending on the year.)
DHE	*Documentary History of Education in Upper Canada.*
JEUC	*Journal of Education for Upper Canada.*
RG 2, PAO	Record Group 2 (Education Records), Provincial Archives of Ontario.

Introduction

The Public School Movement in Upper Canada and Ontario

> I heard one of the most able men say he had managed to get along and he did not know, but his children could do so too. However, since some of his poorer neighbours' children have the blessing of Free Schools, they have been able to show him that learning qualifies even children to fill a useful position in society, so that now he is anxious to have his children educated.
>
> The School Superintendent,
> Kernebee, Frontenac County, 1866[1]

The history of education, like all history, is full of myths. In Canada, as elsewhere, it has had its share of heroes and villains, of triumphs and tragedies. And no subject in this history has been more distorted by myth – or neglect – than the emergence, during the middle of the nineteenth century in Upper Canada and Ontario, of the public school system.

A reason for this, perhaps, is that the nineteenth century school movement has tended to interest professional educators more than it has interested professional historians.[2] More important, however, is the fact that few historians, professional or otherwise, have questioned the basic premises which appeared to motivate the expansion of schooling. Schools and school systems were generally taken for granted, as requiring little or no explanation of their origin, or justification for their continuing existence. A final reason for the relative obscurity of the nineteenth century school movement has been the tendency of historians to focus on its chief heroes – or villains. In the case of Upper Canada and Ontario, this led researchers to concentrate on the personality and achievements of the Reverend Egerton Ryerson, who as superintendent of the province's schools from 1844 to 1876, was

one of the most vocal and effective of Canada's educational missionaries. Certainly it has been difficult to detach the creation of the Ontario school system, one which was as seminal for Canada as certain eastern state systems were for the American republic, from this one man, who thought of himself as its founder and regarded it as his great life's work. But the tendency to focus on Ryerson, and on some of the more notorious religious and political controversies in which he was involved, has until recently led to the relative neglect both of other debates arising out of the public school movement and of other Upper Canadian educators whose role in this history is less well known.[3]

Even when dealing with the history of public schools directly, the tendency has been to take what might be called an "evolutionary" approach to the subject, to emphasize the creation of educational institutions where before there were few or none, the development of new educational methods and of free schooling, or the elevation of teaching to the status of a profession.[4] While perfectly legitimate within the limitations of these purposes, such an approach to nineteenth century educational history in Ontario has nevertheless left many gaps in our knowledge. In addition, it has sometimes obscured our understanding of the events in question. This is because it was based on the assumption that the creations of Ryerson and his contemporaries, if not the inevitable outcome of divine necessity, at least supplied a notable and obvious lack in Upper Canadian social policy. The role of educational innovators therefore emerged in typical accounts of the period as generally progressive, even democratic in tendency, and as reflecting broad popular need, if not demand, while the opponents of educational reform were typed as necessarily men of a narrow or reactionary cast of mind.

As a result, although many of the forces brought to bear on the educational developments of the period from the 1840s to the 1870s have been examined, especially in their religious or political context, few historians have gone very deeply into the question of causes. When they have discussed causes the tendency to view mid-century school reform rather vaguely as a necessary response to the evils of illiteracy and mass ignorance has, until very recently, prevailed. As a result, the myth of a school movement largely motivated by democratic and humanitarian impulses has been allowed to persist almost unquestioned.[5]

Almost equally obscured by myth-making or neglect has been the even more basic question of what mid-nineteenth century school reformers really wanted or achieved. What was the real substance of the profound changes in education which Ryerson,

many of his contemporaries and most subsequent historians have regarded as so self-evidently necessary or desirable? Certainly an enormous amount of school legislation was passed just before and during the Ryerson era. There were the landmark laws of 1841, 1846, 1850 and 1871, which provided for a provincial school system and for free and ultimately compulsory elementary schooling, as well as a host of lesser laws and regulations affecting Upper Canadian education. The question that is central to this book is a very general one: what did the educational innovations embodied in these laws and regulations really mean to the men who promoted them, and to their clients, adversaries and heirs? More specifically, what were the economic and social implications of educational reform in mid-nineteenth century Ontario?

To answer these questions, one must go back, first of all, to what existed before the 1840s, to ask, however briefly, how Ontario children were educated in the early nineteenth century. Here too, mythology has until recently prevailed and the historian would like to have a great deal more information than is currently available.[6] Nevertheless, certain general observations can be made.

Prior to the Ryerson era in Upper Canada and, indeed, nearly everywhere else in the western world in the early nineteenth century, education was characteristically "voluntary" and informal. The usual and perhaps the fundamental educational institutions were the household, workshop and field, since the vast majority of children learned most of what they needed to know from their parents, or from adults in other families to whom they were bound as servants or apprentices. Where churches and commercial activity existed or penetrated in Upper Canada, important supplements to this informal education were sermons, Sunday schools and camp meetings, as well as the gatherings that inevitably took place in houses and shops, villages and towns. Quite a few Upper Canadian children were educated more formally, some by family tutors, others in small schools which men and women ran as private ventures, most often in their own rooms or houses. There also existed, in the larger towns, a few relatively large monitorial schools, run by religious societies for the instruction of the children of the poor. Finally, in 1807, the Upper Canadian legislature had voted funds for district grammar schools, and legislation in 1816 had provided for government-aided local common schools as well, although these were much less generously supported.

Variety in the settings of formal education was matched by an

entirely voluntarist approach to its existence. In most schools, children of all ages gathered in small groups under one teacher for a few months or years, to learn the three R's and a little religion and morals, at a season when they were able to walk to school and their labour was not required at home. The schools, teachers and times of attendance were generally of their parents' or guardians' own choosing. Some of the more ambitious boys stayed in school long enough to study geography, surveying or the classics; a few even went off to college or university in the United States, Great Britain, or, perhaps, continental Europe. But these were few in number. The vast majority of Upper Canadians seem to have been satisfied with a minimal schooling for their children — at home, at a neighbour's, or at the local common school where these existed. Uniformity, if there was any, consisted in the typical brevity of the formal educational experience and in the unchanging nature of the traditional curriculum. Since fees had to be paid regardless of whether the school was partially government supported or entirely a private venture, there was really no clear distinction in the early nineteenth century between private and public education, or if there was one, it was very different from the distinction that later emerged.[7] Most of the families that sent children to school, therefore, expected to pay something for this schooling. It is of singular interest that this mixture of the public and the private, and of the casual and the formal in the education of Upper Canadian children, seems to have produced a basic literacy for the majority of people in the province.[8]

Clearly not all were satisfied with this state of affairs, however. The mid-nineteenth century saw immense change. In the political sphere, Upper Canada united with Lower Canada to form the Province of Canada in 1841 and, then, with Confederation in 1867, became the Province of Ontario. And as if to accompany these fundamental political transformations, educational practices and institutions within its boundaries had also begun to be profoundly altered.

To begin with, much of the voluntarism that had been characteristic of early nineteenth century schooling gradually disappeared. Enabling legislation dating from 1847 and 1850 at first encouraged municipalities to supplement provincial grants by property taxes, in order to make the common schools free; by the School Act of 1871, the provision of free common schools by each municipality became mandatory. By the same law, all Ontario children between the ages of seven and twelve were for the first time compelled to attend some school for at least four

months of any given school year. These developments not only made compulsory in principle what had formerly been seen as entirely voluntary, but also signalled a changing relationship between the school and the state. By 1871, the common school had become a public institution in the modern sense of the term, an institution not only paid for out of public funds, but with publicly defined goals. Indeed, its new role was reflected in the fact that henceforth it was to be officially known as the public rather than the common school.

Secondly, the common or elementary public school had become part of what was increasingly seen as a highly articulated *system* of schools. A growing demand for something "higher" than the common school as well as the expansion of the grammar schools gradually led to the perception of a need for a secondary school that would build on an edifice of consecutively organized, graded elementary instruction completed in the common school. Here too, changing concepts were reflected in changed names. By the 1871 School Act, the new secondary institutions that had evolved from central common schools and grammar schools were to be known as high schools and collegiate institutes. Local responsibility for these schools amounted to the requirement that a sum, equal to at least one-half of the provincial grant for any given school, be raised from local taxes and contributed to its support.

Perhaps even more pervasive in their immediate impact than either the decline of voluntarism or the development of graded public and secondary schools, were the accumulated results of a quarter of a century of centralization in Ontario education. This trend began with the School Act of 1841, which created the office of Superintendent of Common Schools for the united Province of Canada. The powers of the office were exercised by an assistant superintendent for each province, who in turn was aided in Upper Canada, after 1843, by locally appointed school superintendents who managed the provincial grant on the local level, certified the teachers and inspected the schools of their respective regions or communities. At the same time, the School Law of 1843 re-established the traditional elected trustees for the management of the internal affairs of each school section, which the 1841 act had temporarily eliminated. The trustees hired the teacher, managed whatever property the school might have or acquire and exercised control for the time being over what might properly be called the content of the educational experience.

From these beginnings, further legislation and regulation gradually wove a pattern of tightening controls, so that by the 1870s a

great deal had been taken out of the hands of parents, lay superintendents and even of purely local authorities when it came to the schooling of their children. Thus the School Act of 1846, by which the Upper Canadian assistant superintendent became known as the Chief Superintendent of Common Schools for the province, also created a provincial normal school, which would train teachers and gradually set uniform standards for certifying teachers throughout the province. The act also provided for a provincial Board of Education (after 1850 known as the Council of Public Instruction) with regulatory powers over the normal, common and separate schools* of Upper Canada. Both the council and the normal school were in fact very much under the thumb of the chief superintendent, who in the 1850s also extended his authority to include the regulation of the grammar schools of the province, through the Council of Public Instruction and two provincially-appointed grammar school inspectors. Finally, in 1871, a professional and provincially controlled inspectorate for public and separate schools took over many of the responsibilities of the more locally controlled lay superintendency which had existed since 1843.

What were the effects of these developments? It would be wrong to exaggerate the immediate impact of centralization, but Ontario schooling in the 1870s had taken on a new character in many ways. The choice of courses of study, school books, school rules and prayers, which prior to the Ryerson era had been left to the discretion of parents and local school section authorities, was by 1871 clearly in the hands of central bodies – either provincial or municipal – as were the complex rules and regulations which increasingly governed the qualifications, hiring and behaviour of teachers and other previously unheard of functionaries within the growing public school systems. Equally lost to parental or purely local control in many cases were the regulation of school attendance, school financing and a host of other items related to the founding and organization of schools. On the provincial level, a chief superintendent of education, soon to be translated into a minister of education, presided over all publicly financed elementary and secondary schooling as well as the training of

* Separate schools began with the School Law of 1841, which provided that they were to be permitted whenever a number of the inhabitants of any township or parish differed in religious adherence from the majority and wished to have them, thereby becoming eligible for a share of the provincial grant provided to common schools. Their development parallelled that of the common schools during the Ryerson period, and was the subject of much controversy.

teachers in Ontario. On the local level, central boards of education were in the process of creating systems of their own in the province's counties and cities. In the face of competition from these growing public systems, the small household and private venture schools of the early nineteenth century virtually disappeared.

But the most spectacular change of all, perhaps, was the jump in sheer numbers, as great increases occurred not only in the proportion of Upper Canadian children enrolled in schools, but also in the average length of time that their schools were kept open and in the number of pupils in single schools or classrooms. From Table 1 it can be seen that, in 1876, there were two-and-a-half times as many school-age children as there had been in 1846, but the number of pupils registered as attending the common schools had more than quadrupled. There had apparently been one teacher for every thirty-five pupils in 1846; thirty years later the ratio of registered pupils to teachers was seventy-five to one. Schools, which had doubled in number during the three decades in question, stayed open in 1876 for 11½ months compared to 8½ in 1846. They had almost tripled, moreover, the number of students they individually accommodated.[9]

TABLE 1
Changes in Upper Canadian Schooling Patterns 1846 - 1876

	1846	1876
School Age Children (5-16 years of age)	204,580	502,250
Children registered in the common schools	101,912	465,243
	or 49.8%	or 92.6%
Common School Teachers	2,925	6,185
Common Schools in Operation	2,589	4,875
Pupil-Teacher Ratio	34.8	75.2
Pupil-School Ratio	39.4	95.4
Average number of months schools open	8½	11½

From the *Annual Report of the Normal, Model, High and Public Schools of Ontario* (1876) Table Q, pp. 78-80. The percentages are approximate, and overstate the case slightly, since some pupils were under 5 or over 16 years of age. The figures for 1876 refer to what by then were known as the "public" or elementary schools.

One could argue that many of the qualitative changes in education during this mid-century period – the transition from the informal and largely voluntary, to formal, institutional and compulsory education under the aegis of the state – occurred largely as a result of numbers. It would certainly appear that, as more and more children attended common schools, whole new meth-

ods and organizational concepts seemed essential, at least to those who were most closely involved in educational reform. But the basic question remains: why were more and more children encouraged, and finally compelled, to go to school?

The answer to this question is, as might be expected, an extremely complex one, and perhaps can never be more than approximate. One must rely on literary evidence that is often contradictory – the ever-changing opinions of the most articulate among the school promoters, and, as in the case of the father whose opinion is cited at the beginning of this chapter, the very occasional parent. If the written records accurately reveal the true state of educators' intentions, the general answer is that increasing numbers of children were sent to school for longer and longer periods of time because of perceived or anticipated changes both in the nature of the environment, and in the nature and needs of children. Which is more important is hard to say. Increasingly, many school promoters saw the community as a dangerous or unsuitable environment for the child. At the same time, the child was viewed as especially susceptible to dangerous influences, and therefore in need of the school, conceived of as a protective environment. In addition, the schools and the increasing numbers of children who went to them clearly became causal factors in themselves. One gains the impression that because there were schools and more and more children went to them, on a regular basis, people gradually became convinced that all children ought to go regularly to school.

Of course, there was never a perfect consensus on the subject. A few articulate Upper Canadians were outspokenly opposed to mass education; these people, however, tended to be dismissed by school promoters as blatant reactionaries. Then there were others who agreed with the general need for more widespread formal education, but went around, like the advocates of separate schools, promoting fervent debates about what kind of children ought to go to which kind of school, to the great distress of those who claimed that they favoured unitary school systems for all children.

In these debates and discussions, the views of Egerton Ryerson and his chief supporters tended to dominate. For one thing they had at their disposal the growing resources of the Education Department, resources which they used to great effect. Ryerson himself was especially visible. His public career spanned this crucial period of Ontario development, beginning in 1826 when he first crossed swords with the earlier Upper Canadian proponent of formal schooling, but under established church auspices, the